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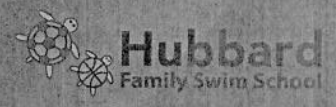
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Each month, *Arizona Parenting* contacts experts to respond to readers' questions with helpful suggestions and information.

**Note:** Material contained herein does not necessarily reflect the opinion of *Arizona Parenting* or its staff. It represents information provided by reputable sources for your consideration.

**Q:** Terry from Maricopa asks, "What discipline methods do you recommend for a child under 2 years of age? For example, should we spank?"

**A:** The first issue to consider is when a child is actually ready for "discipline" of any sort—when it will be effective. Once a child reaches the age at which discipline will be effective, then you need to determine what methods will work for your family, child and the behaviors that need to be addressed.

According to Noel Swanson, MD, MRCPsych, author of *The Good Child Guide*, "Children under 2 years of age do not need 'discipline' as such. They are too young to be 'disobedient.'"

Carleton Kendrick, Ed.M., LCSW, author of *Take Out Your Nose Ring, Honey, We're Going to Grandma's: Hanging In, Holding On and Letting Go of Your Teen*, agrees. "Children at this age have not yet internalized a conscience. Their inappropriate behavior stems from their curiosity and exploration of the world, not a purposeful desire to misbehave."

"They do need guidance and training, however,

and they are able to learn from their experiences," Swanson clarifies. So the best approach for kids at this very young age is to work with them through reinforcement, teaching and guidance.

But what about when children get a bit older and do begin to consciously act out? What is the best approach to discipline? While there are many effective disciplinary methods, opinions are mixed when it comes to spanking, and every parent and family has to decide what is right for them. Some feel it can be detrimental and unnecessary; others feel that spanking has merit in some specific situations and at appropriate ages.

According to Dr.Phil.com, research indicates that spanking may have some potentially positive applications. For example, "Spanking can be effective on a short-term basis in getting children to change any negative behaviors that prompted the spanking." Spanking also has been shown to be effective "when used in conjunction with milder disciplinary methods, such as reasoning and time-outs."

Some other professionals, though, hold that spanking is not the best approach. Scott Herrmann, PhD, of Arizona Child Psychology, PLLC, states, "The negative consequences associated with spanking outweigh the benefits, especially when good alternatives exist."

Kendrick agrees. "I believe parents should

not spank or otherwise physically hurt or intimidate their children at any age."

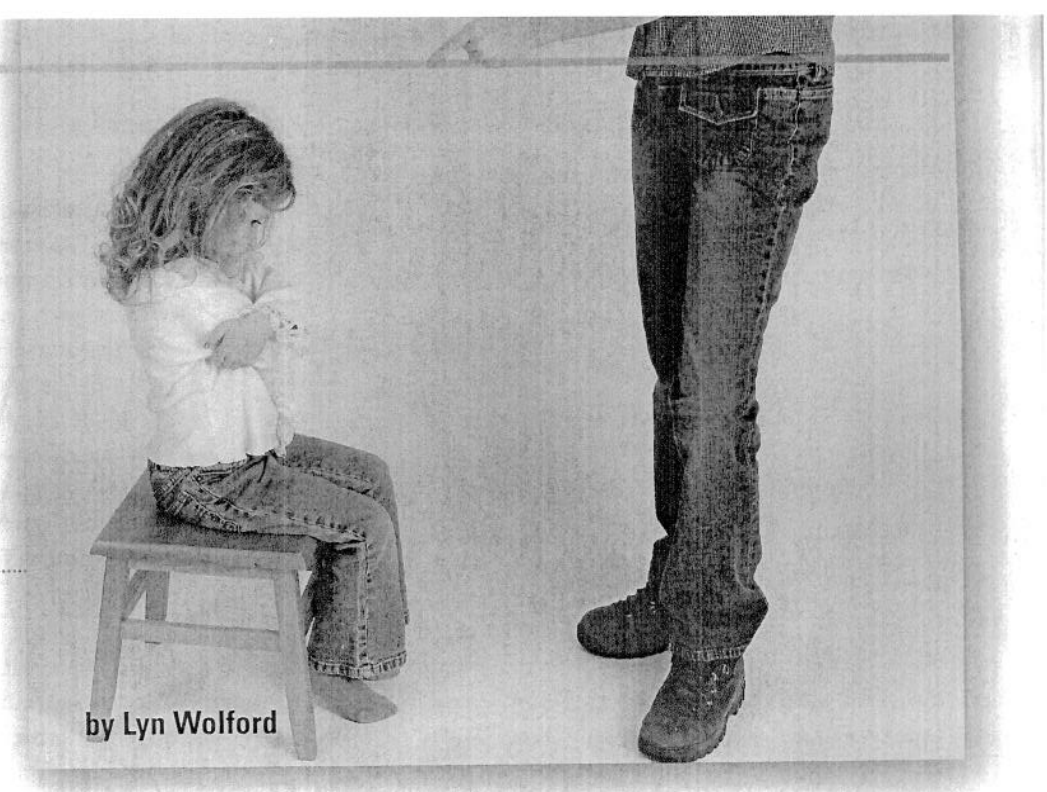
Experts do unanimously agree, however, that positive reinforcement produces better results than any kind of punishment. Swanson explains, "Even as young as 1 year of age children, like any other human being, are more likely to repeat actions that get rewarded and less likely to repeat actions that get punished or ignored."

"The best approach is to encourage good behavior with lots of praise, encouragement and attention and to discourage bad behavior simply by ignoring it (making sure, of course, that the child is not putting him or herself in danger)," Swanson continues.

Whichever method or combination thereof that parents choose, Herrmann explains, "Parents should have many 'tools' in their toolbox, both to correct misbehavior and to shape and promote appropriate behavior. A child psychologist can help any parent fill his or her toolbox with a wide variety of parenting tools and strategies that have proven to be effective." ■

**RESOURCES:** *Arizona Child Psychology, PLLC*, [www.arizonachildpsychology.com](http://www.arizonachildpsychology.com); *Carleton Kendrick*, [www.carletonkendrick.com](http://www.carletonkendrick.com); *Noel Swanson*, [www.good-child-guide.com](http://www.good-child-guide.com).

by Lyn Wolford



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